

MEDICINE BOW NATIONAL FOREST

Revised Land and Resource Management Plan
Final Environmental Impact Statement

Appendix A
Issues, Concerns,
Opportunities

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Introduction

Public involvement is crucial to forest plan revision. National Forest Management Act (NFMA) regulation 219.6(c) states public involvement activities shall be used early and often throughout the development of a forest plan. The Code of Federal Regulations 219.6(b) states that public involvement in the preparation of draft and final environmental impact statements shall conform to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and its associated implementing regulations. The National Environmental Policy Act requires federal agencies to conduct public involvement and provide opportunities for public comment.

The Medicine Bow has conducted an active schedule of diverse public involvement opportunities spanning the revision process, including publication of the Notice of Intent to Revise the Plan in the Federal Register, public meetings, open houses, field trips, speaking engagements, newsletters, meetings with interested stakeholders, our interactive website, and everyday “open door policy” public contact.

The National Forest Management Act prescribes a 10-step planning process. The first step is to identify and evaluate public issues, management concerns, and resource use and development opportunities (CFR 219.12(b)). Regulatory direction is augmented and clarified in Forest Service Handbook 1090.12, Section 4.19(a). This appendix describes the process used and the results of that step.

Public Involvement in the Medicine Bow National Forest Plan Revision

On numerous scheduled occasions, in many informal settings, and by telephone, mail, and email, citizens have had opportunities to state their issues, validate major and other revision issues, and confirm that the issues they care about are addressed in one or more alternatives. Alternatives were developed to address and resolve public issues, both local and national.

The Medicine Bow draft range of alternatives included four alternatives submitted by citizens’ groups. Citizen-generated alternatives emphasized biological conservation, recreation, timber harvest, or non-commodity uses. The Revision Team and the Forest Supervisor assisted citizens in designing alternatives to meet the agency mission, the purpose and need for revision, and revision issues. The Revision Team

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included the citizen-generated alternatives in the draft range of alternatives presented to the public and the Regional Forester. (Two of the citizens' groups alternatives were carried through full analysis as selectable alternatives.) Chapter 2 of the draft Environmental Impact Statement includes a detailed description of the development of alternatives.

Wyoming citizens had additional avenues of access to the Medicine Bow Forest Plan Revision through their local public agencies. The state of Wyoming and County Conservation Districts had cooperating agency status with the Medicine Bow for the Revision of the Forest Plan. Through them, Wyoming citizens had additional representation on the Medicine Bow Forest Plan Steering Committee, which assisted and advised the Medicine Bow on planning issues and processes. The BLM was also a cooperating agency for forest plan revision.

The Medicine Bow Forest Plan Revision Team utilized a variety of public participation activities over the course of the revision process to evaluate and identify public issues related to the revision of the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Medicine Bow National Forest. A chronology of public involvement activities follows:

In January 1993, the Forest Plan Revision Team began work on the Purpose and Need for Revising the Forest Plan and Planning Criteria document for the revision of the Medicine Bow National Forest and Thunder Basin National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan. They conducted informal scoping meetings with Districts, Supervisor's Office staff groups, external organizations, and individuals to identify six major revision issues and 10 other Revision topics. The Medicine Bow Leadership Team validated these issues in late March 1993.

In July 1993, the Forest held five public open house public meetings in Forest and Grassland area communities to confirm revision issues and receive public input. Meetings were held in Gillette, Douglas, Saratoga, Encampment, and Laramie.

The Regional Forester signed the Purpose and Need document for the Medicine Bow National Forest and Thunder Basin National Grassland Forest Plan Revision on **September 7, 1993**.

In early 1995, the Medicine Bow and Routt National Forests were administratively combined. Both forests were revising their plans, and the decision was made to complete the Routt revision before resuming revision of the Medicine Bow Forest Plan. The Routt National Forest Revised Plan was approved in February 1998.

In 1997, the decision was made to separate the Thunder Basin portion of the Medicine Bow Revision and merge it into the Northern Great Plains Management Plans revision process. The Notice of Intent for the Northern Great Plains Environmental Impact Statement and Thunder Basin National Grassland Revised Plan was published in 1997.

The Medicine Bow resumed revision in **October 1998**, and an Addendum to the

Purpose and Need document was published.

On October 7, 1999, a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement and Proposed Action was published in the Federal Register. Publication of the NOI in the Federal Register formally initiated the revision process. The Forest received 992 responses to the NOI and Proposed Action. Each letter was read, and all issues and comments were highlighted. The comments were coded based on subject and entered into a computer database. Summaries of comments and disposition of comments were posted on the Forest website and made available to the public in hard copy. Review of the comments confirmed issues discussed in the 1993 Purpose and Need and the 1998 Addendum to the Purpose and Need.

On October 27, 1999, the Institute for Environment and Natural Resources of the University of Wyoming released *Medicine Bow National Forest, Forest Plan Revision: A Situation Assessment*. The assessment was a public involvement instrument to evaluate public involvement processes and help identify concerns about topics to be addressed during the revision process. The assessment was based on confidential interviews with 42 individuals.

In January 2000, the Forest conducted five open house meetings in communities near the Medicine Bow National Forest to discuss the NOI and Proposed Action. Meetings were held in Saratoga, Laramie, Rawlins, Cheyenne, and Douglas; approximately 385 people attended.

In July 2001, the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Northern Great Plains and the Final Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for Thunder Basin National Grassland were released.

In September 2001, the Forest hosted public field trips at each of the three Ranger Districts (Douglas, Laramie, and Brush Creek/Hayden) to discuss resource issues related to the Medicine Bow National Forest planning process.

In November 2001, the Forest hosted eight facilitated public discussions in Forest area communities to confirm the major revision issues and present draft alternative themes. This format permitted both oral and written comments. Meetings were held in Saratoga, Douglas, Cheyenne, Laramie, Elk Mountain, Rawlins, Encampment, and Baggs; approximately 400 people attended.

In March 2002, the Forest conducted seven open-house public meetings to confirm that each major revision issue was addressed in one or more of the draft alternatives before the Regional Forester selected the final range of alternatives in April 2002. At the open houses, people were asked to validate that their concerns were addressed in one or more of the draft alternatives. Open houses were held in Baggs, Rawlins, Saratoga, Encampment, Douglas, Laramie, and Cheyenne. Approximately 340 people attended the open houses.

Ten forest planning newsletters have been published to convey planning information and invite public comment. The first was published in October 1993 following the

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release of the Purpose and Need document. Publication of the other newsletters began in April 1999 after work on the Medicine Bow Revision resumed.

Public involvement was guided by a comprehensive Public Involvement Plan that contained the following objectives:

- ♦ Identify the issues.
- ♦ Develop a reasonable range of alternatives
- ♦ Identify what should be analyzed and analyze it, where feasible.
- ♦ Maintain visibility and accessibility to provide full public disclosure.
- ♦ Enhance public support of the Forest Service decision.

Throughout the revision process, members of the Forest Plan Revision Team and the Forest Supervisor met with individuals and organizations by phone and in person to discuss the planning process, issues, and alternatives.

The Medicine Bow Internet website was regularly updated with planning information. It also provided an additional way for the public to comment on revision-related matters.

Area newspapers covered the revision and published news releases, articles, and revision-related letters from citizens.

In December 2002, the Draft EIS and Proposed Revised Plan were released to the public with a request to send written comments on the draft documents to the Forest. Alternative D was identified as the agency Preferred Alternative. The 90-day official comment period began on January 4, 2003. Public comments received after the December 16, 2002 release date and by the end of the 90-day comment period (April 4, 2003) were reviewed and included in the content analysis process. Public comments received after April 4, 2003 were reviewed but were not incorporated into the content analysis process. The comment period for the Cooperating Agencies ended April 14, 2003.

In February and March 2003, the Forest and the State of Wyoming conducted open house public meetings in ten communities near the Medicine Bow: Rawlins, Saratoga, Laramie, Cheyenne, Douglas, Encampment, Baggs, Walden, Casper, and Wheatland. The meetings occurred during the middle of the official 90-day public comment period that began when the Notice of Availability of the Draft Revised Plan and Draft EIS was published in the Federal Register January 4.

Public comments form the framework for the refinement of the Medicine Bow Draft Revised Forest Plan. The Forest received approximately 20,000 cards and letters with comments on the draft documents during the official 90-day comment period. The comments represent diverse perspectives and included 5,460 hand-delivered postcards and 11,206 electronic signatures to an internet petition. Each comment was read carefully and coded, so that it could be addressed by the appropriate resource specialists on the planning team. Planning team specialists used substantive

comments to refine analyses and revise the preferred alternative for clarity and accuracy. Due to the extreme volume of comments received on the DEIS, the Forest Service summarized public comments and Forest Service responses to them. These are published with the final EIS in Appendix L-Comments and Responses. The final revised forest plan and final EIS reflects changes and clarification that directly reflect public comments.

Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities – Major Revision Issues

These issues were considered major because changes in management may affect a large land area, create controversy, affect outputs, or make important changes in resource conditions. These issues drove the development of alternatives.

Biological Diversity

Public opinions varied in relation to the desired amount of old growth forests; the importance of habitat fragmentation and connectivity; habitat management of sensitive species; the role and management of wildfire, insects, and disease; and population viability of native and desired non-native species.

Timber Suitability and Management of Forested Lands

Some members of the public wanted fewer acres designated for timber production; others wanted an increase in acres designated for timber production. Some people wanted to maintain the current level or increase the use of clearcutting in forest types such as aspen and lodgepole pine, while others wanted clearcutting eliminated entirely from the Forest.

Recreation Opportunities

Public input centered around motorized recreation opportunities. Some wanted snowmobile use restricted to designated routes, while others wanted the Forest to maintain the current level of snowmobile opportunities. Some wanted a reduction in the miles of open motorized summer routes and an increase in opportunities for quiet recreation; others wanted the Forest to add trails for off-road vehicle use.

Roadless Area Allocation and Management

Opinions varied in the amount of inventoried roadless area to recommend for wilderness designation and how much of the inventoried roadless area should retain roadless character.

Special Emphasis Areas

Members of the public expressed divergent views on the miles of rivers to be recommended as inclusions to the Wild and Scenic Rivers system and how many new Research Natural Areas and Special Interest Areas should or should not be recommended.

Oil and Gas Leasing

Some people support oil and gas leasing, while others want no leasing. Some approve of the standard leasing stipulations; others would like to see no surface occupancy, controlled surface use, and/or timing limitation stipulations available for use.

Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities – Other Revision Topics

Other revision topics represented need for change, but they were not urgent enough to be categorized as amendment topics or would not drive the development of alternatives. These topics generally included out of date Forest Plan direction, and could best be updated with revised standards and guidelines. These issues were used when developing standards and guidelines and when conducting the Environmental Impact Statement's effects analysis.

- ♦ **Minerals management-** While current locatable minerals extraction is low on the forest, there is concern that in the future, the interest in extracting locatable minerals could increase causing adverse resource impacts.
- ♦ **Land ownership adjustment-** There is concern that the land ownership patterns in some parts of the forest are reducing public access to the forest.
- ♦ **Ski area development-** Although use has been steady over the last decade, there is speculation that additional opportunities could increase use benefiting the local economy, but may have potentially adverse environmental impacts.
- ♦ **Travel and transportation management-** The amount and types of roads and trails on the forest are of concern for potential environmental impacts as well as the level of access for forest users.
- ♦ **Fire/fuels management-** The level to which natural fire ignitions should be allowed to burn or be controlled across the forest.
- ♦ **Soil and water resource management-** Potentially adverse effects from management activities and some recreation uses is of concern. In addition, the amount of water yield generated from the forest as a result of

management activities and the potential effects on downstream species is of concern.

- ♦ **Monitoring and evaluation-** Concern has been expressed over the effectiveness of current monitoring activities, lack of data for some resources and costs.
- ♦ **Livestock grazing-** A variety of potentially adverse impacts from livestock grazing have been identified. These include impacts to rangeland vegetation, forage availability for wildlife, and impacts to riparian and water quality.

Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities Not Addressed in the Revision

Some public concerns were not addressed in the forest plan revision. Some are best addressed by other agencies. Other concerns may be matters of project implementation, outside the scope of forest planning or recent previous decisions that do not require attention in this process. Items not addressed in this revision include:

- ♦ Quality environmental education.
- ♦ Level of signing.
- ♦ Administration of special use permits.
- ♦ Law enforcement.
- ♦ Animal damage management
- ♦ Global warming
- ♦ Travel Management direction that prohibits summer, motorized use off designated routes (roads and trails) except for specified exemptions. (This decision was made in October 2000 and would be incorporated into the Revised Plan as stated in that decision).

Public Issues Guide the Planning Process

Consultation with Others

As described previously and required by law, consultation with individuals, organizations, and other agencies spanned the revision process. Specific consultations include the following:

Medicine Bow Plan Revision Steering Committee- The Steering Committee included representatives from the Forest Service (Regional Office specialists, District Rangers, MBNF Directors, the Forest Supervisor, the Wyoming Capital City Coordinator, and members of the Revision Interdisciplinary Team), the Wyoming Office of Planning (formerly the Office of Federal Land Policy), and County

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Conservation Districts. The State of Wyoming, Seven Southeastern Wyoming County Conservation Districts and USDI – Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are Cooperating Agencies according to 40 CFR 1508.5.

The Steering Committee assisted the Revision Team by offering strategic advice and expertise, procuring funding and human resources, and making strategic, process-related decisions that were outside the scope of the Revision Team, but not significant enough to take to the full Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests and Thunder Basin National Grassland Leadership Team. Monthly Steering Committee meetings were open to the public until the Draft EIS and Proposed Plan were released in December 2002.

After the draft documents were released, the Steering Committee held deliberative meetings that were not open to the public. The Steering Committee made recommendations for changes to the draft documents to the recommending official and deciding official. The Steering Committee worked toward arriving at common ground by considering public comments and interests as well as interests reflected by the cooperating agency representatives.

Tribal – The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 470, Section 106, 36 CFR 800) requires that federally recognized Indian tribes be consulted on the potential adverse effects to cultural resources on every undertaking that an agency plans. Federal and Forest Service policy (FSM1563) directs the Forest Service to maintain a governmental relationship with federally recognized tribal governments.

Five tribes were identified for consultation; the Northern Ute, Northern Arapaho, Eastern Shoshone, Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma, and the Northern Cheyenne Tribe.

In June 2003, the Medicine Bow National Forest Supervisor contacted these tribal governments requesting involvement in the Medicine Bow Forest Plan Revision on a government-to-government basis. These tribes were contacted again in August 2003. While there has been significant informal discussion between the Forest and the individual tribes, none of the Tribes was available for a formal meeting during this planning process. Nonetheless, the Revised Plan includes goals, objectives, strategies, standards and guidelines that require consultation with tribes during project development and protection of practices, traditional places and resources used by tribal members.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – The Medicine Bow conducted on-going consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for potential effects on listed species. Formal consultation was initiated with a Biological Assessment in October 2003. The USFWS concluded consultation with a Biological Opinion transmitted by a letter dated December 23, 2003.

Adjacency Analysis – The Medicine Bow consulted a variety of elected officials and local, state, and federal government agencies to address concerns related to shared boundaries. The Forest also met with private owners of adjacent land or land

within the Forest proclamation boundary to discuss concerns such as wildfire, insects and disease, loss of access to public lands, and increasing development near the Forest boundary. Documentation of these consultations is available in the Adjacency Report, which is part of the planning record. (The Revision Team consulted many of the same contacts at other points throughout the revision process.) Contacts included:

- ♦ National Park Service, National Historic Trails Office
- ♦ BLM State Office, Cheyenne
- ♦ BLM Rawlins Field Office
- ♦ BLM Casper Field Office
- ♦ Albany County, Commissioner and County Planner
- ♦ Carbon County Commissioners
- ♦ Converse County Commissioners
- ♦ Laramie County Planning Director
- ♦ Natrona County, County Development Director
- ♦ Platte County Planning Secretary
- ♦ Centennial, Wyoming Water and Sewer District
- ♦ Sand Creek Lands/ Grand Encampment Mountain Resort
- ♦ Northern Arapaho Tribe
- ♦ Eastern Shoshone Tribe
- ♦ State of Wyoming
 - Office of Federal Land Policy
 - Wyoming State Forestry
 - Wyoming Game and Fish
 - Department of Environmental Quality
 - Conservation Districts

Summary of the Analysis of the Management Situation and Demand and Supply Conditions

Following is a brief summary of the Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS), including demand and supply conditions for resource commodities and services, production potential, and use and development opportunities within the Medicine Bow National Forest (36 CFR 219.11 (a)). These summaries were based on data available at the time the AMS was prepared. For current descriptions of existing condition situations, see Chapter 3 of the FEIS.

Biological Diversity

The Medicine Bow National Forest provides a wide diversity of habitats for many species. Species on the Forest include at least 351 vertebrate animals and 1162 species of higher plants (von Ahlefeldt 1996). These vertebrate animal species include approximately 24 fishes, 6 amphibians, 19 reptiles, 227 birds, and 75 mammals. These species provide Forest users and visitors with a full range of opportunities that include sport, commercial, and viewing activities.

The variation in habitats arises from the diverse physical nature of the Forest, which includes three different mountain ranges (the Sierra Madre, the Medicine Bow/Snowy, and the Sherman/Laramie). Each of the ranges has a different history of past human activity and a different distribution of cover type and age classes. The elevation range on the Forest is over 1 mile, from 5,050 to 12,013 feet, with associated changes in temperature and precipitation.

Human activities like logging, grazing livestock, building roads, and suppressing fires have altered the natural processes and disturbances that would have shaped the forest. The following may be outside the historic range of variation due to human intervention:

- The presence or abundance of some species. For example: Some species have been extirpated: grizzly bear, gray wolf, possibly lynx and wolverine.
- Exotic plants (weeds) have invaded and displaced native grass and forbs.
- Fish communities and aquatic insect communities in Haggerty Creek and Bear Creek have changed because of point-source pollution due to mining (copper compounds).
- Vegetation structure. For example: There is more high-contrast edge in high-elevation forest because of roads, clearcutting (Dillon and Knight 2003).
- Size of canopy gaps is larger in high-elevation forest due to thinning and removal of standing dead trees (Dillon and Knight 2000).
- Conifers have spread into adjacent shrub and grassland because of fire suppression (Dillon and Knight 2003).
- Ecological processes. For example: Water diversions from some streams in the Forest have reduced baseflows, lowered water tables, and changed the abundance and distribution of riparian vegetation. Most of these impacts occur in the foothills areas of the Forest (Eaglin 2001).
- There is less beaver activity in montane riparian areas (Cеровski et al 2001), resulting in lowered water tables, reduced baseflows, and different riparian vegetation abundance and composition.

- Soil scarification is greater, with deeper disturbance than would have occurred in a fire. (Dillon and Knight 2003).

Timber

Recent purchasers of Medicine Bow National Forest timber resources are primarily Louisiana-Pacific (LP), with a mill in Saratoga, WY, and Bighorn Lumber, with a mill in Laramie, WY. The LP mill can process a variety of log sizes and species to produce a wide variety and grades of lumber products. The Bighorn mill focuses on high quality lumber products. LP can process up to 53 million board feet annually using one shift. The one-shift capacity for Bighorn is about 15 million board feet.

In recent years, the Medicine Bow National Forest has supplied LP and Bighorn with approximately 20% of their total timber supplies. The balance of timber supplies has been provided by private and state lands. Changes in the industry come more quickly today than in years past. Lumber prices, energy costs, international imports, and alternative supply sources all influence the share of timber supplies provided by a single landownership. Consequently, the future demand for timber from the Medicine Bow National Forest cannot be characterized by a simple projection of historic trends. It can be stated with certainty, however, that current mill capacities far exceed the volume offered.

Recreation

There are 693 developed campsites on the Forest, with capacity for 500,000 persons over the course of an average season. Most of the campgrounds on the Forest were constructed in the 1960s. Campground use levels average 32%. A 1991 corridor analysis determined there was no need for additional capacity of developed campsites on the Forest.

Waste management is an important problem in developed and dispersed recreation sites. Unless a waste disposal site is developed, it is possible that the Forest Service may have to close some public facilities on the Forest.

There are 237 miles of nonmotorized, multiple use trails outside of Wilderness Areas. Nineteen percent of Medicine Bow National Forest trails are in Wilderness. The remaining 81% are in a natural setting, closer to development.

Dispersed camping occurs forest-wide alongside roads. For this reason, the 2,592 miles of developed roads on the Forest are highly valued by some members of the public. The 2000 Travel Management Decision prohibits motorized travel off designated roads and trails (except for snowmobiles). Analysis for Phase II of Travel Management Decision is underway. Phase II will establish the Forest network of closed and open roads.

Winter recreation on the Forest includes snowmobile riding, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, backcountry skiing, and downhill skiing/snowboarding. The season

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begins in late November, and lasts into the middle of April – 150 days.

Conflicts between winter motorized and winter nonmotorized recreationists are increasing. Issues include competition for limited parking at selected high use sites, and the desire to experience the same forested settings concurrently. This also presents a safety concern in some cases.

The Snowy Range Ski Area is under permit for approximately 464 acres along the Snowy Range National Scenic Byway (Hwy 130) west of Centennial, accommodating 50,000 skier days per year.

Information on current activity preferences was collected in a national effort to better assess visitor use on National Forest system lands. The National Visitor Use Monitoring program was implemented on the Medicine Bow National Forest in 2002, and those visitor numbers will be used as baseline to project future recreation trends on the Forest. By 2020, recreation use levels for all activities together may be expected to increase by as much as 27%. Wildlife viewing and viewing scenery show a much higher increase (41-49%). The activity showing the highest projected increase in use is cross-country skiing, expected to increase by 89% by 2020.

Roadless/Wilderness

Planning regulations (36 CFR 219.17) require the Forest Service to inventory, evaluate, and consider all roadless areas for possible inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. As part of the revision process, the Medicine Bow used geographic information systems (GIS) to identify areas that meet the following criteria:

- ♦ Minimum of 5,000 acres of contiguous lands;
- ♦ Contain less than 5,000 acres but are contiguous to an existing wilderness; and
- ♦ Contain no classified roads.

The existing wilderness areas on the Medicine Bow National Forest total 79,323 acres, approximately 7% of the Forest. They are the Platte River Wilderness (22,363 acres); the Encampment River Wilderness (10,400 acres); the Huston Park Wilderness (31,300 acres) and the Savage Run Wilderness (15,260 acres).

The roadless area inventory on the Medicine Bow National Forest, completed in 2000, identified 31 roadless areas on the Forest totaling 319,738 acres, about 29% of the Medicine Bow. All 31 areas were found to be capable and available for wilderness and will therefore be evaluated for proposed wilderness designation.

The 1985 Forest Plan allocates a number of roadless areas to prescriptions that allow road building. Management of inventoried roadless areas continues to be controversial due to varying public desires and resource demands for the roadless areas. Some people want management of roadless areas to provide opportunities for nonmotorized recreation, and maintenance of current ecological values. Others

would like limited development allowing motorized use of these areas for recreational driving or off-road vehicle driving. Still others would like the areas to be fully available for such uses as timber production, oil and gas leasing, and recreation development.

Special Areas

Wild and Scenic Rivers: Two potential Wild and Scenic Rivers, the North Platte and Encampment, were considered in the 1985 Forest Plan. The 1985 Plan left both rivers in the wilderness management prescription. Therefore, continued implementation of the 1985 Plan would result in no Wild or Scenic Rivers on the Medicine Bow National Forest.

For the plan revision, all streams on the Forest were evaluated to determine if they meet the eligibility criteria for Wild and Scenic rivers. Using eco-regions listed in the Regional Desk Guide, the initial river list was further screened to determine which rivers had outstandingly remarkable values at the regional or national level. Rivers with outstandingly remarkable values were then given a potential future classification rating of Wild, Scenic, or Recreational. Rivers that were not free-flowing or had no outstandingly remarkable values were classified ineligible and were dropped from the screening process. As a result, the Forest has six potential Wild and Scenic River candidates:

- ♦ North Fork of the Little Snake River.
- ♦ Roaring Fork of the Little Snake River.
- ♦ West Branch of the Little Snake River.
- ♦ Rose Creek.
- ♦ North Platte River.
- ♦ Encampment River.

Each potential Wild and Scenic River will be incorporated in one or more Plan Revision Alternatives.

Special Interest Areas are areas of local interest and are managed to protect or enhance their unusual characteristics. The following six areas on the Forest were identified in the 1985 Plan as special interest areas:

- ♦ Ashenfelder on the Douglas Ranger District, for botanical values.
- ♦ Cinnabar Park on the Laramie Ranger District, for botanical values.
- ♦ Dry Park on the Laramie Ranger District, for botanical values.
- ♦ Gambel Oak on Battle Mountain on the Brush Creek/Hayden District, for botanical values.
- ♦ Libby Flats Ribbon Forest on the Laramie and Brush Creek/Hayden Districts, for geologic and botanical values.

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- ♦ Medicine Bow Peak on the Brush Creek/Hayden Ranger District, for botanical values.

For the plan revision, a comprehensive analysis identified 21 additional potential SIAs representing geologic, botanical, historical, scenic, or zoological values.

Research Natural Areas (RNAs) are selected to provide a spectrum of relatively undisturbed areas representing a wide range of natural variability within important natural ecosystems and environments. RNAs may serve reference, educational, or research purposes. There is currently one RNA on the Forest, the Snowy Range Natural Area, 771 acres (749 GIS acres), which was established in 1937. In 1994, the Forest contracted with The Nature Conservancy to inventory potential RNA candidates. The Nature Conservancy provided reports of potential RNAs on the forest, which included detailed descriptions, distinguishing features, and acreage by vegetation cover types. Of those considered, 13 were identified as meeting the criteria for possible inclusion in the RNA network.

Oil and Gas Leasing

Limited areas of the Medicine Bow National Forest have medium and low potential for oil and gas resources, based on geologic factors necessary for oil and gas accumulations. Approximately 75% of the Forest has no known potential for oil and gas resources due to the presence of crystalline rocks at the surface and at depth.

Eleven exploratory wells, all plugged and abandoned, were drilled on the Forest between 1954 and 1983. Thirty-two exploratory wells were drilled between 1919 and 1987 in areas adjacent to the Forest in the western Sierra Madre area and northern and eastern Medicine Bow area. These wells are also plugged and abandoned.

Currently, there are no active oil and gas leases on the Forest. Production has been established in fields within five miles of the western Sierra Madre and eastern Medicine Bow areas of the Forest.